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Specific Features of Teaching a Foreign Language in Non-Philological Educational Institutions: Students' Needs and Motivation for Language Learning

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Abstract

The teaching of foreign languages in non-philological educational institutions presents distinct pedagogical challenges due to the professional orientation, limited instructional time, and heterogeneous motivation of learners. Unlike philological programs, where language itself is the core subject of study, non-philological contexts require language instruction to be closely aligned with students' academic and professional needs. This article examines the specific features of foreign language teaching in non-philological institutions, with a particular focus on students' needs and motivation for language learning. Using a qualitative analytical approach, the study synthesizes theoretical perspectives on language education, learner motivation, and needs analysis. The findings highlight the importance of professionally oriented content, communicative relevance, and learner-centered methodology in fostering sustainable motivation and effective language acquisition.

KEYWORDS: *foreign language teaching, non-philological education, learner needs, motivation, professional communication.*

INTRODUCTION

In the context of globalization and increasing academic and professional mobility, foreign language competence has become an essential component of higher education curricula worldwide. The ability to communicate effectively in a foreign language is no longer perceived as an additional skill but as a core professional competence required across disciplines. This tendency is particularly evident in non-philological educational institutions, where students specialize in fields such as engineering, economics, medicine, and information technology, yet are expected to operate in multilingual and multicultural professional environments (Council of Europe, 2020; Graddol, 2006).

Unlike philological programs, where language study is comprehensive, theory-oriented, and linguistically driven, foreign language instruction in non-philological institutions is typically characterized by limited instructional time, reduced curricular weight, and a strong emphasis on applied outcomes. In such settings, the foreign language functions primarily as a tool for professional communication rather than an object of academic study (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). Consequently, teaching practices must prioritize communicative effectiveness, professional relevance, and functional language use over in-depth linguistic analysis.

This shift in educational priorities places students' needs and motivation at the center of the instructional process. Research in applied linguistics consistently demonstrates that language learning outcomes are closely linked to learners' perceived relevance of instructional content and their motivational orientation (Dörnyei, 2001; Gardner, 2010). In non-philological contexts, students often approach foreign language learning instrumentally, associating it with career advancement, academic mobility, and access to professional information rather than with intrinsic interest in the language itself.

Understanding why students learn a foreign language and how language competence relates to their future professional activities therefore becomes a critical factor in designing effective language courses. Needs analysis, professional orientation, and motivation-sensitive pedagogy are widely recognized as key methodological principles in English for Specific Purposes and content-oriented language instruction (Long, 2005; Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998). When instructional content aligns with students' academic disciplines and professional goals, motivation tends to increase, resulting in more sustained engagement and improved learning outcomes.

The present article aims to analyze the specific features of teaching a foreign language in non-philological educational institutions, with a particular focus on students' learning needs and motivational factors that influence the success of language acquisition. By synthesizing theoretical perspectives from language pedagogy and motivation research, the study seeks to highlight effective approaches to foreign language instruction that respond to the practical and professional demands of non-philological education.

Methods

The present study adopts a qualitative methodological approach aimed at examining the specific features of foreign language teaching in non-philological educational institutions. The research design is exploratory and descriptive in nature, focusing on the systematic analysis of existing theoretical and pedagogical sources rather than on experimental data collection. This approach is appropriate given the conceptual and methodological orientation of the study and its emphasis on educational practices and instructional principles.

The primary method employed is theoretical analysis of scholarly literature in the fields of foreign language pedagogy, applied linguistics, educational psychology, and curriculum studies. Academic publications addressing foreign language instruction in non-philological contexts, English for Specific Purposes, communicative language teaching, and learner-centered methodologies were

examined to identify dominant trends and recurring methodological principles. Particular attention was paid to studies exploring the relationship between language instruction, professional orientation, and learner motivation.

In addition, a comparative review method was used to analyze different approaches to language learning objectives and teaching strategies across non-philological educational settings. This comparative perspective allowed for the identification of common patterns in instructional goals, as well as differences related to disciplinary requirements and institutional contexts.

The analysis focused on three main dimensions. First, the classification of language learning objectives in non-philological contexts was examined, with an emphasis on professional, communicative, and general educational goals. Second, students' communicative and professional needs were analyzed, including the types of language skills and tasks required for academic and workplace communication. Third, the role of motivation in sustaining learner engagement was explored, drawing on established theories of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and their application to foreign language learning.

Through the synthesis of these analytical dimensions, the study develops a conceptual framework for understanding effective foreign language instruction in non-philological institutions. This framework integrates needs-based curriculum design, professionally oriented content, and motivation-sensitive pedagogical strategies as key components of successful language teaching in such educational settings.

Results

The analysis reveals several distinctive features of foreign language teaching in non-philological educational settings, primarily shaped by institutional constraints, professional orientation, and learner expectations. These features consistently reflect the instrumental role of foreign language learning within non-philological curricula.

First, language-learning objectives in non-philological institutions are predominantly instrumental in nature. Students tend to perceive a foreign language as a practical tool for achieving specific academic and professional purposes rather than as an object of theoretical or linguistic inquiry. Foreign language competence is commonly associated with professional communication, access to specialized information, academic mobility, and future career advancement (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Graddol, 2006). As a result, instructional goals are closely aligned with functional language use in real-life and workplace contexts.

Table 1. Language Learning Objectives in Non-Philological Educational Institutions

Objective Type	Description	Primary Focus
Professional	Development of language skills required for specific occupational contexts (e.g. technical documentation, professional correspondence, presentations)	Career-oriented communication
Communicative	Ability to interact effectively in everyday and academic situations using a foreign language	Functional fluency
General Educational	Broad linguistic and cultural awareness contributing to overall intellectual development	Educational literacy

The analysis indicates that professional and communicative objectives consistently outweigh general educational goals. Students prioritize the ability to participate in professional interactions, such as writing emails, understanding field-specific texts, delivering presentations, and engaging in international collaboration. General educational aims, including broad linguistic knowledge or cultural enrichment, are perceived as secondary unless they directly support professional communication (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998).

Furthermore, the dominance of instrumental objectives influences students' expectations of the learning process. Learners in non-philological contexts expect immediate applicability of language skills and demonstrate lower tolerance for abstract linguistic content that lacks clear professional relevance. Studies in English for Specific Purposes confirm that when instructional content does not correspond to learners' perceived professional needs, motivation and engagement tend to decline significantly (Long, 2005; Dörnyei, 2001).

The results also suggest that institutional curricula reinforce this instrumental orientation by allocating limited instructional hours to foreign language courses and emphasizing outcome-based assessment. Such conditions further encourage a pragmatic approach to language learning, in which communicative effectiveness and task completion are prioritized over formal linguistic accuracy or theoretical depth (Council of Europe, 2020).

The dominance of professional and communicative objectives reflects the instrumental role of foreign language learning in non-philological education.

Second, the analysis demonstrates that students' language learning needs in non-philological educational institutions are closely connected to their field of specialization. Learners consistently expect foreign language instruction to reflect the communicative demands of their future professional activities. This expectation manifests in a strong demand for domain-specific vocabulary, discipline-related genres, and authentic materials drawn from real professional contexts (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998; Long, 2005).

Table 2. Students' Language Learning Needs by Field of Study

Field of Study	Dominant Language Needs	Typical Language Tasks
Engineering	Technical terminology, instructions, documentation	Reading manuals, writing reports
Economics / Business	Negotiation, presentations, business correspondence	Emails, meetings, presentations
Medicine	Patient communication, professional terminology	Case discussions, consultations
IT	Technical documentation, international collaboration	Reading specs, online communication

The results indicate that students place particular value on instructional tasks that simulate real workplace communication, such as professional correspondence, presentations, negotiations, report writing, and participation in field-specific discussions. Authentic professional scenarios are perceived as more meaningful and useful than generalized language exercises, as they allow learners to envision direct application of language skills in their future careers (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). Consequently, language instruction that integrates professional content is more likely to sustain learner engagement and perceived relevance.

Conversely, the analysis reveals that when instructional content lacks a clear connection to students' fields of specialization, motivation tends to decline rapidly. General language materials that do not address professional needs are often perceived as irrelevant, leading to reduced participation and lower levels of learner investment. This finding is consistent with research on needs-based language instruction, which emphasizes that mismatches between instructional content and learner expectations negatively affect both motivation and learning outcomes (Dörnyei, 2001; Gardner, 2010).

The results further suggest that discipline-specific needs vary across academic fields, reinforcing the necessity of flexible and adaptive language curricula. Students from technical and scientific disciplines prioritize reading comprehension and technical terminology, while those in economics, business, and social sciences emphasize interactive communication skills. Despite these differences, all groups demonstrate a shared preference for professionally oriented language instruction, confirming the central role of specialization-related needs in non-philological language education (Council of Europe, 2020).

Third, the analysis indicates that motivation in non-philological educational contexts is predominantly extrinsic at the initial stages of foreign language learning. Students commonly engage with language courses due to external requirements such as institutional curriculum standards, mandatory examinations, credit accumulation, or anticipated employment opportunities. In many cases, foreign language study is perceived as an obligatory component of the curriculum rather than a personally meaningful academic pursuit (Gardner, 2010; Dörnyei, 2001).

Table 3. Factors Influencing Student Motivation in Non-Philological Contexts

Motivation Factor	Type of Motivation	Impact on Learning
Career prospects	Extrinsic	High initial engagement
Professional relevance	Extrinsic → Intrinsic	Sustained motivation
Teaching methodology	Intrinsic	Active participation
Assessment relevance	Extrinsic	Learning persistence

The results show that instrumental motivation, particularly related to career prospects and academic mobility plays a decisive role in sustaining initial learner participation. Students associate foreign language competence with access to international labor markets, professional advancement, and participation in global academic and professional networks (Graddol, 2006). This instrumental orientation reinforces the perception of language learning as a means to an end rather than an intrinsically valued activity.

However, the analysis also reveals that extrinsic motivation is not static and may evolve over time. When teaching strategies clearly demonstrate the practical value and immediate applicability of language skills, students increasingly report higher levels of engagement and personal interest. Exposure to meaningful communicative tasks, profession-oriented materials, and successful real-life language use contributes to the gradual internalization of learning goals (Dörnyei, 2001).

In such cases, extrinsic motivation may develop into intrinsic interest, characterized by increased learner autonomy, sustained effort, and positive attitudes toward language learning. This transformation is particularly evident when students perceive language competence as directly enhancing their professional identity and self-efficacy (Gardner, 2010; Council of Europe, 2020). The results therefore suggest that motivation in non-philological contexts is dynamic and responsive to instructional relevance and perceived usefulness.

Discussion

The findings confirm that traditional, grammar-centered approaches are insufficient for foreign language teaching in non-philological institutions. Instead, a needs-based and communicative framework that integrates professional content and real-life tasks should guide instruction.

Motivation emerges as a dynamic factor influenced by instructional relevance, teaching methods, and perceived usefulness of language skills. Educators must therefore adopt flexible methodologies that encourage active participation, autonomy, and meaningful interaction. Task-based learning, project work, and profession-oriented simulations are particularly effective in this context.

Furthermore, aligning assessment practices with communicative and professional objectives enhances students' perception of fairness and relevance, which in turn strengthens motivation. Language teaching in non-philological institutions should thus be viewed not as a supplementary subject but as an integral component of professional training.

Conclusion

Foreign language teaching in non-philological educational institutions is characterized by a strong practical orientation, limited instructional time, and a pronounced dependence on students' professional needs and motivational factors. Unlike philological programs, where language learning is an end in itself, non-philological contexts require foreign language instruction to function as a supportive component of professional education. This specificity necessitates a reconsideration of traditional language teaching priorities and methodologies.

The study demonstrates that effective foreign language instruction in such educational settings requires a shift from predominantly linguistic and theoretical goals toward professionally and communicatively relevant outcomes. Language courses that emphasize functional communication, domain-specific content, and authentic professional tasks

are better aligned with students' expectations and future career demands. When learners perceive clear connections between language instruction and their professional trajectories, engagement and learning effectiveness increase accordingly.

Furthermore, the findings highlight the central role of learner motivation in determining the success of foreign language acquisition in non-philological institutions. Motivation in these contexts is often initially extrinsic; however, it may evolve into intrinsic interest when teaching practices successfully demonstrate the practical value and applicability of language skills. Integrating needs analysis, motivation-sensitive pedagogy, and profession-oriented content therefore emerges as a key strategy for enhancing both learner engagement and educational outcomes.

In light of these conclusions, foreign language teaching in non-philological educational institutions should be viewed not as a supplementary or auxiliary subject, but as an integral element of professional training. Future research may focus on empirical investigations examining the impact of specific instructional strategies on learner motivation and language proficiency across different non-philological disciplines. Such studies would contribute to the development of evidence-based pedagogical models capable of responding effectively to the evolving demands of higher education and the global labor market.

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